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TONGANS IN AUCKLAND

A Preliminary Investigation of the Tongan Community
in the Central Auckland Urban Area

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ABSTRACT

The minority Polynesian community examined in this thesis required more than those research techniques familiar to students of migrant groups. Specific interviewing difficulties and solutions to these are proposed for interviewing Tongans. Suggestions to overcome the suspicions of respondents and the dangers of ethnocentrism on the part of the researcher are also suggested. A questionnaire is included and its design, to include internal checks and ease in tabulation are noted. Chapter Two deals with migration motives, both real and stated. These motives are confined in the main, to those acting at the source, Tonga, and include population pressures on land, housing, employment and capital. Data is provided from recent surveys in Tonga, together with the results of a survey of Tongans residing in the Central Auckland Urban Area, 1974. An examination of data provided by the Department of Statistics, concerning arrivals and departures, is included in Chapter Three. This is supplemented with data on airfares and the manner in which the migrant raised sufficient capital to purchase his passage, from the survey. Special attention is paid to permits and the reason why some Tongans have overstayed their legally permitted stay. Chapter Four compares the demographic and social characteristics of Tongans with other Polynesians in New Zealand. Age, marital status, dependents, sex, religion, birthplace and educational qualifications of migrants in the survey are recorded. The results of an investigation into the occupational and residential characteristics of Tongan migrants are recorded in Chapters Five and Six. Comparison is drawn between the unskilled occupations of Tongans and other Polynesians and the location of place of work and residence is noted. The method of securing initial employment revealed the social and psychological pressures impinging on the recent migrant and reasons and results suggested. Using data supplied by the Department of Statistics the spatial distribution of Tongans in New Zealand, and in particular each statistical subdivision of Auckland is recorded. Movement over time within the Central Auckland Urban Area is discussed using indices of segregation and a Lorenz Curve.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines some of an increasing number of migrants entering New Zealand from the kingdom of Tonga. The research recorded in this thesis had two main aims:

1. To investigate the demographic structure and migrant characteristics of Tongans residing in Central Auckland,
2. To investigate residential and occupational characteristics of Tongans residing in Central Auckland.

For a year prior to the research, an understanding of Tongan language and custom was gained through the assistance of Tongans in Palmerston North. Research in Central Auckland was undertaken using a questionnaire as the primary information gathering tool. It was administered to 114 Tongans over the age of 15 years gainfully employed and residing in the Central Auckland Urban Area. This area was chosen because it was the most densely settled Tongan area in New Zealand. The size of the population universe was unknown. According to the 1971 Census, there were 887 Tongans in Central Auckland. This figure should be interpreted with caution. The Department of Statistics is aware of defects in collection and coverage. Some Tongans are unable to accurately complete the Census form. Those who have overstayed their permits would not wish to be recorded in the Census. In some cases the appearance of a white face on the door step would be sufficient excuse not to answer the door.

Finally, the inadequate grasp of English might make it impossible for other than a Tongan to administer the Census.

How many Tongans there were in New Zealand in 1971, and how many are here now is impossible to ascertain. According to the 1971 Census 1416 Tongans were resident in the Auckland Urban Area. Figures extracted from the 1971 New Zealand Census, when adjusted through the addition of excess arrivals over departures, provided the most accurate total available for the Tongan population in New Zealand.

A coded questionnaire was prepared and tested in Palmerston North on Tongans in various occupations. These included students, teachers, mechanics, labourers and nurses. After some adjustments, flash cards were prepared with the range of responses available for each question. These were in both English and Tongan to assist the respondents, many of whom were more at ease communicating in Tongan than English.

An assistant, able to translate, accompanied the author on many occasions. This provided an informal introduction and established a relaxed atmosphere.

The coded responses were punched onto computer cards and processed using a Burroughs 6700 computer to print out frequencies and cross tabulations.

Definition of a Tongan National

The computer print-out from the 1971 New Zealand Census recognised four racial groups of Tongans. These were Tongan,

that is people of pure Tongan blood; Tongan-European, people who were half or more Tongan and part European; Tongan-New Zealand Maori, people half Tongan or more and part New Zealand Maori; and finally, European-Tongan, people half or more European and part Tongan.

These classifications tend to provide an inflated value to the total number of 'Tongans' in New Zealand. It is possible to be classified by the Statistics Department as Tongan with only 1/32nd or less Tongan blood. If European-Tongans were excluded from the total Tongans in Auckland Statistical Area, the grand total would reduce from 1416 to 635. For the purpose of this thesis, a Tongan is defined as anyone falling within the Statistics Department classification, unless otherwise stated. This includes Tongans by name who are now naturalised citizens of New Zealand.